

Let's give James Earl

By **MIKE VINSON**

"RAPE: to seize and take away by force. PLUNDER, DESPOIL. *Webster's Third Edition International Dictionary.*

With James Earl Ray, the convicted assassin of Martin Luther King Jr., standing at the crossroads of life and death, a question echoes throughout the world: "Did Ray assassinate King?"



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Every player in the James Earl Ray/Martin Luther King case knew that if he or she played the game the way it was *supposed to be played*, the payoff was potentially tremendous.

Today's team is no different. Am I saying the prudent rendering of justice took — is taking — a backseat to personal gain? A backseat to covering up the truth? Possibly. Let's ingest and digest some nourishment for thought.

Going back to that time in 1968, we must further ask: Who were the players? What were their stakes in the game? No doubt, the players were major leaguers, or, at least, players with aspirations for the major leagues.

If James Earl Ray receives a liver transplant, and all goes well, he will be around a while longer and undoubtedly would get a new trial. He has in his corner his ever-persevering attorney, William Pepper, the clout of not only the King family but other influential black leaders such as the Rev. James Lawson, actor/comedian Dick Gregory, and civil rights activist Hosea Williams, and his dogmatically diligent, younger brother, Jerry W. Ray.

I spoke with Jerry Ray the other night and challenged him with this: "OK, now, Jerry. You're James' brother, and of course you're gonna say he's innocent. Mr. X, standing over there, says James is guilty. Tell me why I should believe you instead of Mr. X."

Jerry's reply: "The state of Tennessee and the U.S. Justice Department have fought all these years to keep James out of court. Why are they so scared about James having his day in court?"

"What else have you got to convince me?" I asked Jerry.

"Other than the rifle that supposedly was used to gun down King, the only evidence was the statement of a man (Charles Quitman Stephens, who had a lengthy record for public drunkenness, saying he saw a man running down the hallway of the flophouse from which the fatal shot supposedly was

Ray the trial he deserves

fired, immediately after he had heard the shot fired.

"After being shown an FBI photograph, Stephens identified the man in the photograph and the man he claimed to have seen running as being the same. But Stephens' wife, Grace Stephens, wouldn't corroborate her husband's story. You know what they did to her?"

"What did they do?"

"They put her in Western State Psychiatric Hospital in Bolivar, Tenn. She stayed there until the prosecution got their guilty plea in the King assassination, until author Mark Lane, along with the Rev. Lawson and other clergymen, got her released.

"I personally talked to her. She told me, 'Jerry, I spent all them years in a mental institution because I wouldn't identify your brother, and I still say to this day it wasn't him.' "

But, I reminded Jerry, "James Earl signed the guilty plea."

"Who wouldn't! if they were locked up in a torture chamber cell, with bright lights — like a television studio — shining on them 24 hours a day, and a guard with them 24 hours a day?"

Jerry closed our conversation with this: "It is necessary for this liver transplant to go off because if James dies, everything stops. And that's why they're stalling.

"They don't want James to get a liver transplant because he'll die and everything will stop. However, I talked the other day to Dexter King, one of Martin Luther King Jr.'s sons, and he told me that if James dies before he gets a new trial, then he (Dexter) will call for a special prosecutor, because he wants to *know who really killed his dad.*"

Not only does Dexter King want to know who really killed his dad, but the rest of us do as well, and the only way everyone will know is if James Earl Ray gets a much-needed liver transplant and is allowed a new trial. If that doesn't take place, we'll never know whether or not a double rape was committed: 30 years as a human's life unjustly seized and taken away, and the public being robbed of the truth, the "PLUNDER" of an event of profound historical significance.

I would think that those in question — Justice Department officials, FBI, politicians, whomever — would want James Earl Ray to stand trial and end this issue once and for all.

If they're on the up-and-up and have nothing to hide, why worry? Surely they don't want to go down in history veiled with a shroud of wrongdoing. The time to scream is now! ■

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